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ABSTRACT

With the exception of special education programs, the major responsibility and authority for educational decision making has belonged to teachers, administrators and school boards. A review of literature on parent-school relationships suggests that there have been two dominant trends. The first, which advocates "partnership," is consistent with keeping education and schools as they are. The second, which questions school practices, particularly as they relate to special groups of students (handicapped, minority, poor) and advocates some form of an adversarial model, is focused on changing educational practices and policies. The special education exception, providing more participation in educational decision making for special needs students and their parents, has enormous programmatic, fiscal, and ideological implications. Parent-school relationships seen in such settings as Head Start, segregated schools, and other special education services reflect the experience of special education in setting up mechanisms for parents and students to question and oppose school policies and practices. Over 70 references are included in this literature review and discussion. (Author/CB)

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PARENTS AND SCHOOLS: PARTNERSHIPS OR POLITICS

by

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Abstract

The literature on parent-school relationships suggests that there have been two dominant trends in the field: the first, which advocates "partnership," is consistent with keeping education and schools as they are; the second, which questions school practices, particularly as they relate to particular groups of students -- handicapped, minority, poor -- and advocates some form of an adversarial model, is focused on changing educational policies and practices. Each of these is examined in light of unserved and underserved populations, data on children out of school, school disturbances, the status of knowledge in education and special education and the ability of schools to assure all students equal protection in the educational process. The experience of special education in setting up mechanisms for parents and students to question and oppose school policies and practices is presented as one way of responding to current inequities in American schools.

Introduction

The relationship between parents and schools has been given increasing attention over the past several decades (Henderson, 1981; Lightfoot, 1978). Although there has been much written about greater parent involvement, the traditional role of parents has been passive and accepting of whatever schools had to offer (Mead, 1951; Turnbull and Turnbull, 1985). School personnel have made the important decisions about education -- who goes to school and who does not, what is taught and how it is taught, what standards are used to evaluate students, and what services are to be provided as part of educational programs. Parents have been expected not only to accept those decisions, but to reinforce them by ensuring their children's regular attendance, completed homework and good behavior. While many professional educators and critics from other fields have challenged curricula methodology, there have been few challenges of the process of schooling, particularly that part of the process that does not include parents (or excludes parents) as participants.

It has generally been assumed that in educational matters educational professionals have expertise -- that they know best (Gliedman and Roth, 1980; Sarason and Doris, 1979; Tomlinson, 1982). Until the special education litigation of the early 1970s, parent challenges of that expertise not only in their

children's schools, but also in state and federal courts were invariably rejected in favor of the judgements of professional educators. Courts ruled that they could not and would not run the public schools -- that was the responsibility of teachers, administrators and school boards. Except for special education this is still the case. A different set of rules has been legislated for students who have been identified as needing special education. These students along with their parents have been enfranchised to become active participants in the process of making decisions about their schooling. They have been given the means to challenge and even reject educational decisions made by schools. If parents of special education students are not satisfied with the schools' response, they can transfer the school's authority for making decisions to an impartial hearing officer (Budoff and Orenstein, 1982).

This exception to educational decision-making for special needs students and their parents has enormous programmatic, fiscal and ideological implications. It means that school systems can be (and have been) ordered to provide or pay for programs and services for which there is no budgeted allotment, that may be unprecedented, expensive and philosophically distant from traditional educational practices. Furthermore, private special education placements paid for by public schools are in direct contradiction to the traditional separation of public and private education.

A "Right To Education"

The federal provisions that every child is entitled to an adequate and appropriate public education, that "related services" be provided in order to achieve that standard, and that residential treatment is part of the required continuum of services (P.L. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975), are leading to a radical redefinition of the responsibilities of public education and the role of parents in making decisions about which children need to be educated and about what is to be included as educationally-related services. This process of realignment is still in an embryonic stage. Even with such extraordinary entitlements, relatively few parents of children with special needs actively enter into the decision-making process, often because they are not accustomed to being intrusive. When they do enter the process, they have traditionally gone along with whatever the schools propose. Most children who are in private special education placements were placed there by the mutual agreement of parents and schools, but as a result of the school's initiative, not at the initiative of parents or by hearing officers. Nevertheless, the entitlements are in place in all states. More and more parents are becoming aware of the components of what is referred to as the "right to education" entitlements of all children -- the rights to refer their child, to be notified of their rights, to multidisciplinary evaluation, parent involvement and sign-off authority, an individual education plan, an independent evaluation at the

school's expense, an impartial hearing, a yearly review, no change of program or placment without parental consultation and authorization.

Who Is, Who Should Be, and Who Will Be in Special Education

These components make it possible for any parents, not only parents of children who have been identified as requiring special education, to raise questions about the education of their children if they are willing to go the special education route. The issue of who can be included as being eligible for special education is complex and controversial. It is very clear from data about special education that referral, identification and placement of children in special education programs is extremely inconsistent. There is little professional agreement across disability categories, including programs for children with particular disabilities (Epps, Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1985), schools and classes within schools (Oliff, 1984), communities, (Saunders, 1980) and states (U.S. Department of Education, 1984; Heller, Messick and Holtzman, 1982) about who to include in which category. Therefore, it can be argued that any student whose needs are not being met by the schools as evidenced by truancy, school failure, disruptiveness or whatever, is at least a candidate for referral. If there is a disagreement between parents and school about the special education designation of a particular child, it can be brought before a hearing officer. The decision would depend on whether a particular case fits into

state crtiteria for special education eligibility.

What is at stake is the accountability of schools to provide students with an education that satisfies the students, their parents and their advocates. It is assumed here that all students who are failing, truants, dropouts, or who are not able to succeed in regular programs are not satisfied with the programs being offered. At the present time, this population is divided into two groups, those in special education and those who are either not in school or who are in regular education. The former group has the entitlements listed above. The latter do not. It is further assumed, albeit vaguely, that the former group is "handicapped." If the student does not fit and is handicapped, there are due process entitlements. If a student does not fit but is not "handicapped," then there are no such entitlements. This all depends on the definition of "handicap" and how it applies to particular students. But it has already been argued that "handicap" is an extremely imprecise term that is interpreted in vastly different ways in different states, different communities and even between classrooms within the same school. Therefore, the distinction between having or not having a "right to education" entitlement which can be critical to educational programming and services, is based on extremely feeble constructs that appear to say more about the individuals or agencies that use them than about the "handicapped" individuals who are being labeled. This viewpoint is discussed in some depth by Gliedman and Roth (1980), Biklin and Bogdan

(1983); Roth (1983) and Tomlinson (1982).

It is the position of this paper that the distinction between handicapped and non-handicapped will eventually be subsumed by the distinction between success and failure in school, where failure includes any condition other than success in regular classes and at least grade level performance in basic skills. This does not mean that all failure, truancy, dropouts or low level performance in basic skills are assumed to be either the "fault" of the schools or of students. Rather, it means that there is a burden on the schools to show that appropriate alternative progrms are developed and made available to all students. Where this cannot be demonstrated, "right to education" entitlements should apply. Students and parents who are being minimally served by schools should have the right and the process to generate alternative programming and services. The model exists in special education. There is a process. There are standards. And there is recourse to hearings and courts. It may seem expensive and it is unlikely that professional educators, special or regular, teachers or administrators, will vote for it, but the expense and unpopularity of a wide application of special education "right to education" process would have to be compared to the even greater expense of thousands of dropouts, truancy that leads to average daily attendances of 60 percent to 70 percent of total enrollement in many urban schools and a staggering number of illiterate and semi-literate teenagers.

A critical issue is whether the problems of educating children and youth who are school failures or dropouts, but have not been identified as "handicapped," are substantially different than educating students who have been identified as "handicapped." Are there different psycho-social principles at work here? Do different learning theories apply to these two populations? Should the deliberations for planning educational programs for "handicapped" students be governed by a different set of regulations than for their "non-handicapped" peers? And, even more pointedly, is the education of "non-handicapped" school failures to be left exclusively to professional educators while the education of the "handicapped" is subject to parental, student and, possibly, judicial involvement and review?

Parents and Schools

In order to further explore these issues it is important to describe and comment on the different kinds of relationships that exist between schools and parents in both regular and special education, the rationale for and the assumptions behind these relationships, the connections between them, and the knowledge base of education and special education.

Partnership. In recent years several themes about relationships between parents and schools have emerged. There is the frequently referred to "partnership" between schools and parents that will, allegedly, maximize the benefits of schooling

for children (Berger, 1981; Knoblock, 1983; Lillie and Place, 1982). Parents and teachers and school administrators are to join together for the best interests of children. They are to communicate, meet, work together and collaborate. It is assumed that they have a common goal, the welfare of children, and a common means, to be worked on by using traditional procedures in an amicable fashion. "Traditional" means that educational programs will be developed, implemented and evaluated by the schools, and parents will be supportive of those programs, and will contribute fine-tuning through "partnership." The forums that are used to engage in this process are parent-teacher associations, visiting days, parent-teacher meetings regarding grades or discipline and other informal and usually benign exchanges.

It should be clear that to the extent that "partnership" implies equality, it is misleading because there is no provision in public education for parents to be enfranchised as equal partners in the educational process. Fiscal, personnel, curricular and disciplinary activities of schools have been and are the responsibility of professional educators. While it is thought to be sensible and courteous to keep parents informed, the running of schools has not been the business of parents. This situation persists because most parents and professionals want it this way, and because they do not see any alternative. It worked for them and it should work for their children.

The literature on the relationship between parents and schools seldom deviates from the "partnership" course. There are relatively few books or articles on parents changing (Lurie, 1975), dealing with (Bushkin, 1975), or organizing (Bilklin, 1974) schools or institutions, or families and schools being "worlds apart" (Lightfoot, 1978) or on "parents speaking out" (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1985). More than 90 percent of the titles surveyed for this paper (1965-1986) were about "partnerships." The oppositional nature of school-parent relationships in those cases (low-income, minority, delinquent, handicapped) where schools are not adequately serving students is never mentioned. This literature leads to the possible conclusion that if the parents of students who are not making it in the schools would "partner-up" with the school everything would be "O.K."

Another kind of "partnership" realtionship is a support group whose purpose is to facilitate the development of strategies and skills by parents so that they will be better able to cope with their handicapped children (Davidson and Dosser, 1982; Pizzo, 1983; Samit, Nash and Meyers, 1980). These kinds of activities are usually led by professionals, often school psychologists, adjustment counselors, local mental health personnel, or staff of local and state parents' associations. They are generally not political, although support groups can certainly develop political agendas. The purposes of these groups are more to understand and deal with the status quo than

to change it.

Adversarial relationship. A different and rather contrasting theme is that schools and parents are adversaries whose views of educational means and ends are colored by different positions vis a vis the child (Lightfoot, 1978). For the parents of a child, the focus is on what is best for the child. If the child is "gifted" the parents will want a program for "gifted" children. If the child is "mentally retarded" then the parents will give their attention and enegies to those "kinds" of programs. Educators, on the other hand, are obligated to develop and operate programs for children in all curricular areas. At the same time that they are developing science programs, they must be concerned with special education programs.

Positional differences are exacerbated when children have disabilities, children and parents are culturally different than the professional educators who are running the programs, or when parents and schools have differing views about what the form and content of education should be (Gliedman and Roth, 1980; Lightfoot, 1978). This adversarial theme can be cast in a number of different forms. When parents question the schools about the education of individual children, it can be referred to as case advocacy -- advocating for a particular case. When parents organize to question the schools about educational programs for groups of students, it can be referred to as class advocacy. This can be further broken down, depending on the size and extent

of the class and the specificity of the problem being addressed. In any of these forms, the role of parents is to critique educational programs, to question, to seek alternatives, and most importantly, to become active, rather than passive participants in the making of educational decisions about both individuals and groups of students.

Choices

The choice between "partnership" and "adversarial" approaches is mainly a function of parental satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the educational status quo and, if there is dissatisfaction, where the problem "is" -- in the student or in the schools. Parents who are satisfied with the system will fit well into a "partnership" model that stresses common values and goals and an acceptance of existing programs, personnel and policies. It places the burden for both operations and change upon professionals who have developed and are running the system. And it fits in with the traditional unequal relationship and imbalance of power that has come to exist between schools and parents. This stems from the non-political character of parent-school "partnerships." There is no challenge of authority or expertise. There is no power struggle. There is no contest over who has final authority to make decisions. There is generally only an amicable dialogue about the school's plans and programs, the assumption being that if there are problems, they reside within the students, not within the schools.

Dissatisfied parents are either going to accept their lot, or take steps to seek remedies. While there is certainly middle ground -- where parents raise questions and seek change through "partnership" dialogue -- it is the position of this paper that when this works it is, in general, at the pleasure of the schools and does not break ground for the resolution of future disputes. Therefore, occasional examples of "partnership" resolution do not detract from the central argument of this paper -- that "partnership" models are status quo models, and that parents, or for that matter professionals, who want to change systems need to develop and operate politically-based models that give them the mechanisms to challenge those systems.

If the priority is changing the system, then what is required is an active "political" model of parent involvement in education, rather than a passive "partnership" model (Biklin, 1974; Lurie, 1980). While there have been examples of this kind of involvement in recent years, they have usually been short-lived, depending on particular child or community crises, and the active phase is quick to subside when the crisis is over. Professional educators have and will continue to resist "political" models except when they can use them to serve their own purposes.

The question can be raised as to whether elected school committees and boards, which certainly are political bodies, are capable of being adversarial vis a vis profesional educators and

their educational policies and practices. The answer is clearly no, as those educators are employees of school boards (Tucker and Ziegler, 1980). If school boards set policies, their employees are obligated to carry them out. There very well may be (and, of course, are) clashes between school boards and staff and school boards and parents. But with the exception of special education, the administrative resolution of problems between school boards and particular parents or groups of parents is not negotiable. School boards can and sometimes do hold hearings to listen to different points of view. They meet with constituents and receive letters about school policies and practices. But after listening and taking notice of community views, they make their decisions and for all practical purposes, there is no appeal. The key to adversarial activity is that there is an avenue of appeal, and that parties to disputes are aware of such recourse, and need to take it into consideration when they make appealable decisions as opposed to non-appealable decisions.

Thus, a distinction is being made here between the politics of school boards and the politics of both case and class parent involvement. School boards represent the community. Parents represent themselves. They have children in school, children who have particular characteristics and who behave in different or dysfunctional ways, children who speak different languages and who come from cultures that have different values and traditions. While these parents are often at odds with majority interests, they have legitimate (often "right to education") minority

rights. Their children have a right to be there and to receive what other children are receiving even if they are different or if they have deficits.

The problem for advocates of parent involvement that goes beyond elected school boards and "partnerships" with teachers is that it is not clear what can take the place of what currently exists. Should some kind of adversarial mechanism be a permanent part of the system or must it be an impromptu expedient for responding to crises? Should there be a committee of parents having authority to make decisions or to substantially influence the decisions of school boards and professionals? Is there a need for another political entity in the system in order to better balance the diverse interests of cultural and ethnic minorities, handicapped students and other groups that have fundamental differences in values, interests or needs?

Head Start

The most recent beginnings of a true "political" model of direct parent involvement took place in Head Start programs of the middle and late 1960s. While Head Start was not uniform in the way parent councils were developed and in the roles that they played, many models were created. A model developed in Mississippi under the auspices of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) (Greenberg, 1969) has been said to epitomize the Head Start model of school/parent/community relations.

Because of the extent of poverty in Mississippi, Head Start was a huge enterprise in that state, spending large sums for food, clothing, busing, salaries, health care, building construction and renovation, and training. Head Start was conceived as an educational program for preschool age children of poor families. But from its beginning it was clearly much more than that. It was health, nutrition and daycare for children. It was many things for parents and other adults in impoverished communities. But most significantly, it was intended as a program that would stimulate change. Parents' councils were given authority over programs. Parents and other individuals (usually without any professional training) from Head Start communities were given positions of responsibility. They became teachers, supervisors, directors. They had responsibility for large sums of money. They were given crash training programs. They developed organizational skills.

All of this activity and structure introduced an extraordinary dimension into this federally-sponsored alternative to public school education -- consumers became directly involved in the enterprise and began to take control of an educational system. They became a political force. They were in direct opposition to the status quo. It was no accident that Head Start programs that were run by and for parents and others from the communities where they lived, were usually in conflict with the professionals who ran the local public schools. They had seen and experienced what the local schools were doing. While some

children from poor communities had been successful, many were excluded or dropped out of school (Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Task Force on Children out of School, 1970). In fact, local schools expected and depended on dropouts to maintain a reasonable class size.

These Head Start parents wanted something different for their children. Federal legislation and funding had given them funds and structures to take over an educational program, and provided a form of due process whereby they could make choices about the form and content of that education.

While the analogy between parents and schools today and Head Start 20 years ago is not perfect, it helps us to probe the central issue of this paper. It highlights the fact that the domination of public education by professionals is intertwined with substantial inequities in education. One way to begin to deal with these inequities is to involve those who have been the victims and to place appropriate checks and balances on those who have been responsible for developing or maintaining discriminatory practices.

Are There Really Two Sides?

Some time ago I was contacted by a group of parents from a suburban community. They were extremely upset about their local public school's special education program, particularly by the

response of their school system's director of special education and by the tentativeness of the system's commitment to their children. They had gone before a local school committee and requested that the program be evaluated by someone outside of the system. The superintendent had recommended an outside evaluator, but the parents said to him and then to me, that the person selected would almost certainly evaluate the program from the school's perspective, rather than from their perspective. The parents told me that they had heard that I was "on their side" -- that I would understand their views and that I would be able to empathize with their experience.

Are there really two sides as these parents thought and felt, or is there just one side -- that of professional competence? Is the state of the educational art and science such that there is professional consensus about identification, evaluation, placement and teaching of children without disabilities? Or is there such divergence of views that there is little professional agreement about preferred practices? The argument for strong parental entitlements to influence, if not to determine, decisions about the education of children rests upon the answers to these questions. It is assumed here that professional agreement will follow from consistent research findings about diagnosis, planning, teaching and program effectiveness. Conversely, inconsistent and contradictory findings will lead to professional disagreements about preferred educational practices. If the research does not clearly lead in

particular directions, major policy decisions will have professionals on both sides, depending on ideological preferences and past experiences. Decisions about students and programs will depend more on persuasion and circumstance than on evidence and other professional considerations.

The answers to these rhetorical questions should be clear -- there is simply no professional consensus about the whos, whats, hows, whys or whens of teaching in either regular or special education (Skrtic, 1986). The research on reading does not point to a "best method" of teaching reading (Chall, 1983). "Efficacy" research in special education does not resolve the question of where to place students who have been identified as educable mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed or learning disabled -- in special classes or in regular classes (Carlberg and Kavale, 1980). Research on grouping of students -- sizes and kinds of groups -- does not lead to data that are useful for making decisions about grouping practices in schools or of justifying homogeneous classes or schools (Kulick and Kulick, 1982). The conclusion about the connection between research and practice is unmistakable -- it is inconclusive. Other factors -- traditions, politics, values, convenience -- would appear to be much more significant in the origin, development and maintenance of educational practices. Research does play a role in the total professional process, but it has not lead to a single dominant paradigm, or even two or three major paradigms. Rather, as Skrtic (1986) argues, special education is both multidisciplinary

and multiparadigmatic. This can be translated as "special education can be viewed in different ways by different disciplines and by different individuals." What is best for particular students or groups of students should not be determined by an expert or by the experts, but rather by a dialogue of the "experts" with each other and with parents and others who are directly involved including, where feasible, the student or students.

The Quiet Revolution

The dilemma raised in this paper concerns the operational relationships that exist between parents and schools. The prevailing practice which has worked in most cases, is and has been a kind of unequal "partnership" that leaves educational decision-making to professional educators. The exception to this is that the parents of children who have been judged to be in need of special education and have a "right to education" can void the "partnership" tradition by rejecting the required (for special education students) individual education plan (IEP). This can lead to a number of important entitlements -- notice, independent evaluation, impartial hearing, right to appeal to state and federal court -- all of which constitute a basis for adversarial proceedings. The reasons for this exception are important to this discussion.

These entitlements of children in need of special education

and, it follows, of their parents, developed as a result of considerable litigation in the 1960s and early 1970s (Neal and Kirp, 1986). These attacks on status quo educational practices, initiated by parents and parent groups, challenged local and state laws and practices regarding the exclusion of children with severe disabilities from the public schools (Mills, 1972; PARC, 1972). The opinions and consent decrees that resulted ruled that all children, no matter how severely handicapped were entitled to free, appropriate, public education and to due process if there was any question about the substance of that entitlement. What must be noted about this legal conclusion is that all of this litigation was against the exclusionary practices of public schools -- practices which had been developed and maintained by the professionals and politicians (school boards) who operated public schools, and by the professors of education who taught teacher education and educational administration in colleges and universities.

The system of public education and teacher education that existed in the United States in the 1960s and before, and which had been designed, developed, operated and defended by educational professionals was, found to unjustly (in terms of American constitutional principles) discriminate against children with disabilities because of exclusion, segregation and inferior educational practices. Further, these exclusionary practices were an important part of the fabric of American education. They were directly related to such critical educational practices as

the grouping and placement of students, disciplinary practices, and the grading and promotion of students. In other words, our educational system was (and for the most part still is) partially built on a foundation of illegal practices which had been developed by those professionals who were in charge of that system. Thus, even with, or perhaps because of all of their training, experience and expertise, they had created a system that was seriously flawed in a number of telling ways: it was found to be illegal because it denied handicapped students equal protection under the law (Lora, 1978; Mills, 1972; PARC, 1971).

It is important to underline the extent of the professional dilemma that was precipitated by this tidal wave of litigation and the ensuing "right to education" cases. The entitlements of special education students to due process regarding all aspects of their education -- identification as needing special education, evaluation, planning, placement, periodic re-evaluation, disciplinary procedures -- is what has been referred to as the "quiet revolution" (Abeson and Zettel, 1977). The implications of this "revolution" for the kinds and degrees of parent involvement are enormous. The further implications of this for professionalism are equally impressive. In light of this history of discrimination in education, and the legal remedies that have been ordered by judges and legislated federally and in all of the states, it is important to take a fresh look at all educational practices. Special education came under close scrutiny because of categorical exclusion -- severely

handicapped school age children not receiving any education. What will happen when regular education comes under similar scrutiny? The superintendent of schools of Boston recently reported that more students dropped out during the 1985-86 academic year than graduated at the end of that same year! What does this say about the appropriateness of education? What does it say about the right of Boston students to an education? And more directly related to the theme of this paper, what does it say about parental entitlements to know and to be empowered to participate in making decisions about the education of their children?

What exists in regular education is the same problem that existed in special education 20 years ago. There are serious gaps in public educational systems -- gaps that will not be narrowed or eliminated without political or legal action. School boards and educational professionals have their missions. Parents of handicapped, culturally, racially, ethnically, ideologically and economically different children have their missions. Those two sets of missions are not only different, they are often in opposition to each other. Parents can be "partners" with teachers if, and only if, there are common values and purposes serving as a foundation for educational programs. Where that commonality does not exist, in other words where there is clear opposition, then either parents must give way or they must have the means to deal with the opposition. The consequences of not having such means are clear. The history of

racial segregation in schools (Kluger, 1975), the exclusion of handicapped children (Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Cottle, 1976; Task Force on Children Out of School, 1970), the huge drop-out rates of black and Hispanic students, the disproportionate placement of black children in particular kinds of special education programs (Heller, Holtzman and Messick, 1982; Larry P. v. Riles, 1972; Lora v. New York City Board of Eduction; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1978), the disproportionate amount of non-compliance with "right to education" laws in schools that serve minority children (Allen v. McDonough, 1984) are all testimony to the inequitable development of educational programming when it is unbridled by minority interests.

Segregated schools cause and reflect a segregated society, whatever the bases for that segregation. It is not that professionals invented segregation or exclusion, or that they have gone along with them, which they usually have, but rather that they have invented elaborate arguments for continuing and expanding practices that now appear to be invidious. Practitioners worked hand-in-hand with researchers to improve and extend the educational system, but clearly not to seriously change the system. But this "improved" and "extended" system began to go bankrupt in the 1960s, a process that is still very much in evidence. The impetus for the humane audit system that lead to the "quiet revolution" in special education clearly did not come from professional educators. It came from those whom

the system had abandoned. Our legal system made it possible to challenge an educational system that was incompatible with our Fourteenth Amendment provision for equal protection under the law.

Discussion

The lesson from this history is that systems, including educational systems, have abandoned and will continue to abandon constituents who are deemed to be least desireable and least successful unless there are checks and balances. One but certainly not the only appropriate mechanism to foster inclusiveness in schools is the enfranchisement of parents. Special education has developed a model, with many local variations, that uses this strategy. This model provides checks and balances through structures and procedures for adversarial transactions between dissatisfied parents and schools. It recognizes the severe limitations of special education knowledge and practice in determining what is best for children who do not fit into regular education. It also includes principles that are consistent with the legal imperative of "equal protection under the law" -- children are to be educated in the least restrictive environment; schools are responsible for the education of all children (between statutory ages), no matter how severely and multiply disabled; any form of separate or segregated schooling needs to be justified; handicapped children cannot be deprived of schooling without due process.

There is a certain quality to the "right to education" direction that special education has taken that has special implications for the "other" eduation. When schooling is not working for a student or for groups of students (black, Hispanic, poor, handicapped) there is a strong tendency for educators to label the problem as laziness, recalcitrancy, stubborness, lack of support from the family or peer pressure -- all examples of what Ryan (1976) refers to as "blaming the victim." This has also been developed at some length as an application of a "medical model" to educational problems (Ford, Mongon and Whelan, 1982).

If there was clear evidence, or perhaps even some evidence, that this "blaming the victim" model worked for disenfranchised students, there would be little political pressure to look elsewhere. But the evidence suggests otherwise -- that although educators have great expertise in identifying the symptoms -- they give "Fs", they use special classes, they exclude -- they rarely develop suitable remedies, such as alternative programs. To the extent that each of these "remedies" has been tested in research or in the courts, they have failed. As a result, the courts have essentially ruled against them, whether the "them" is special class, exclusion or some form of tracking. The problem is that all of these "remedies" are based on the same principle -- that the curriculum, including what is taught and how it is taught, is appropriate and adequate for achieving "equal protection." It follows that there is something wrong with

students who do not and cannot succeed. The alternative -- that there is something fundamentally wrong with schools which do not educate large numbers of minority and handicapped students -- is discussed by critics (Ilyich, Friere, Giroux) but is largely ignored by educational practitioners, based on the assumption that most students in schools are well-served. It will continue to be ignored unless there is something worse in the wings that is ready to come on stage. That "something worse" is "right to education." This would involve a transformation of parent-school relationships from benign "partnerships" that exist now, to the threat of a system that permits parental challenges to school-initiated educational plans.

The stage for such a transformation in many urban schools is set. Its props are high dropout rates, differential disciplinary and special education treatment of minority students and those from lower-income homes, average daily attendance rates that show substantial numbers of students not in school each day, students bringing weapons to school on a regular basis, assaults on teachers and principals, destruction of school property and buildings and the extremely low functioning on basic skills of increasing numbers of students. It matters little that most students in most communities are well-served. The minority that are poorly served raises the specter that there is "unequal protection" rather than "equal protection" guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. While the insurance for that guarantee ultimately rests in the courts, there is critical need for the

system to develop its own quasi-judicial mechanisms to allow for and handle disputes. Promoting parental rights is not the only course to follow, but it appears to be the most appropriate now.

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